DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 410 683 EA 028 584

AUTHOR Poole, Wendy L.
TITLE The Construction of Professional Unionism by Teacher Union Leaders.
PUB DATE 1997-03-00
NOTE 31p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, March 24-28, 1997).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Quality; Elementary Secondary Education; *Organizational Objectives; *Professional Development; *Teacher Associations; *Teacher Welfare; *Unions

ABSTRACT

Teacher unions are increasingly perceived as principal stakeholders in determining the overall effectiveness of school systems. This paper presents findings of a study that explored how teacher union leaders construct meaning about teachers' self-interests and education interests. Data were collected through interviews with 18 teacher union leaders in a teacher organization in an eastern Canadian province. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that the teacher union had dual roles--to promote both the economic welfare and professional development of teachers. Less frequently mentioned (65 percent of participants) was a third role, that of promoting quality education. Only 12 percent mentioned a fourth role of the union, a concern for social justice. Factors that influenced the construction of the union's role included membership issues, the government's policy agenda, the degree of public support for union goals, and the extent to which members shared a local or provincial perspective. The study found that the self-interests and the educational interests of teachers are interdependent, complementary opposites. In times of crisis union members concentrate on their immediate needs and sometimes lose sight of the larger picture. However, teachers eventually realize that their immediate needs cannot be met without attending to the long-term best interests of the educational system. Economic welfare and professional development are complementary forces that may be pulled to a higher level by a mutual concern for quality education and social justice. Understanding this relationship can serve as a bridge to developing productive relationships between union and management, and between union and government that may lead to renewal and growth for the education system. (Contains 27 references.) (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 410 683

The Construction of Professional Unionism by Teacher Union Leaders

Wendy L. Poole
University of Connecticut
249 Glenbrook Road, U-93
Storrs, CT 06269
(860) 486-0237
Fax: (860)486-4028
E-mail: Poole@uconnvm.uconn.edu

Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association,
Chicago, March 24-28, 1997

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN OTHER THAN PAPER COPY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

W. Poole

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

EA 028 584

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Increasingly, teacher unions are perceived as principal stakeholders in determining the overall effectiveness or ineffectiveness of school systems. An argument has been made that teacher unions will have a crucial role in restructuring relationships so as to achieve greater flexibility while ensuring improved coordination within public school systems (Shedd & Bacharach, 1991). Key educational stakeholders, such as government and school board policy makers, need to know how to engage teacher unions in collaborative efforts to improve teaching and learning and to create effective learning environments for students. Yet, little is known about how teacher unions understand their role in creating effective schools or their potential for significantly impacting educational policy. In order to effectively engage teacher unions in school improvement efforts, we need to understand more clearly how teacher union leaders construct meaning about their role and how they act upon that constructed meaning. Such knowledge will contribute to a better understanding of how teacher unions are, or may be, engaged in productive relationships with other key players as a means to enhance the capacity of educational systems.

Critics argue that the traditional model of teacher unionism is dysfunctional and must change dramatically in order to improve the school system's capacity to provide quality education. Some critics are calling for teacher unions to put aside the mantle of industrial unionism and to embrace what has been called "professional unionism" (Kerchner & Koppich, 1993; Kerchner & Mitchell, 1988; Streshly & DeMitchell, 1994), which is characterized by a collaborative partnership between union and management, a broadening of the scope of collective bargaining to include educational policy decisions, and by a "balance between teachers' legitimate self-interests and the larger interests of *teaching* as an occupation and *education* as an institution" (Kerchner & Caufman, 1993, p. 19, emphasis included).

How do teacher union leaders make sense of the union's role? In particular, how do teacher union leaders make sense of the relationship between teachers' self-interests and teachers' educational interests? What internal and environmental factors mediate the ability of teacher unions to pursue educational policy decision making? How does sensemaking influence the way in which teacher union leaders enact the union's role? As a first step in understanding the complex relationships between teachers' interests and teacher union action, this paper will address how teacher union leaders construct meaning about teachers' self-interests and teachers' educational interests.

Background

Traditionally, teacher unions have been depicted as negative forces affecting education. Teacher unions in Canada and in the United States have acquired reputations for being militant, uncooperative, resistant to change, and for contributing to the deskilling of teachers. Teacher unions have been accused of diluting or derailing educational reform efforts, of undermining the authority of administrators, and of impeding economic restructuring and prosperity (Peck, 1988; Toch, 1991; Urban, 1982). Unions have been accused of pursuing narrow self-interests, often at the expense of broader educational interests (Angell, 1981; Berube, 1988; Nelson, Carlson, & Palonsky, 1996), of protecting incompetent teachers (Bridges, 1986; Nelson, et al., 1996; Williams, 1981) and of raising the cost of education without improving the quality of education (Angell, 1981; Eberts & Stone, 1984; Lieberman, 1980; Nelson, et al., 1996; O'Reilly, 1978). To state these accusations more succinctly, teacher unions have been criticized for pursuing the self-interests of teachers (e.g. economic welfare, working conditions, personal well-being, contractual and legal protection) and giving lip service to broader educational interests.

Teacher unions have been depicted as subscribers to a form of unionism which is more suitable for industrial contexts than for professional employment contexts (Bacharach, Shedd & Conley, 1989; Kerchner & Mitchell, 1988; Shedd, 1988). Critics argue that the traditional model of teacher unionism is dysfunctional and that it must change dramatically in order to improve the school system's capacity to provide quality education for students and in order to better represent their members' interests in a strong educational program.

Some scholars perceive that teacher unions <u>are</u> undergoing metamorphosis. Kerchner and Mitchell (1988) describe a developmental process in which teacher-management relations evolve through three distinct phases or "generations": (1) first generation labor relations, or the "meet and confer" phase, is characterized by expectations that teachers and administrators are altruistic and concerned about the welfare of children, and that the school district will assume a paternalistic stance in relation to teachers; (2) second generation labor relations, or "the era of good faith bargaining," is characterized by industrial-style collective bargaining, rigid and legally binding contracts related to economic welfare and working conditions, and adversarial relations between union and management; (3) third generation labor relations, or "professional unionism," is characterized by a collaborative partnership between union and management, a broadening of the scope of collective bargaining to include educational policy decisions, and by a "balance between teachers' legitimate self-

interests and the larger interests of teaching as an occupation and education as an institution" (Kerchner & Caufman, 1993, p. 19, emphasis included).

Although Kerchner and his associates categorize most teacher unions as second generation unions, they claim that a few teacher unions, such as those in Rochester, Pittsburgh, and Dade County, Florida, have entered third generation teacher unionism (Kerchner & Koppich, 1993; Kerchner & Caufman, 1993). The involvement of these teacher unions in educational reform, and the development of peer review and accountability programs, underscores the fact that the definition of teachers' interests are subject to debate and possible change. The teacher unions described by Kerchner and his associates appear to be in the process of redefining teachers' interests in a way that blurs the distinction between teachers' self-interests and teachers' educational interests. Are such activities indicative of a reframing of teachers' interests by teacher unions? The study described in this paper attempted to answer that question by exploring how teacher union leaders construct meaning about teachers' self-interests and teachers' educational interests.

Methodology

This study involved a teacher organization that serves as the sole bargaining agent for approximately 10,000 teachers in a province in eastern Canada. Union leaders who participated in the study were asked to explain what they perceived to be the role or roles of the union and to elaborate on the relationships between teachers' self-interests and teachers' educational interests. To enable greater depth of interaction with each participant and to make the study feasible in terms of researcher time, it was necessary to limit the number of participants. Therefore, the study focused on leaders who were elected at a regional level to represent members in decision making at the provincial level. These elected leaders serve as boundary spanners between the professional staff at the central office and union leaders at the local level. Focusing on them permitted the researcher to examine issues at the provincial or state level and to assess their relevance to issues at the local level. Other participants were selected to include a central office perspective, a local perspective, and the perspective of a militant splinter group within the union. Participants were added to the study until data saturation occurred and the researcher was confident that the sample represented various geographical regions within the province and various perspectives within the union. Participants included 12 elected members of the provincial executive; 2 staff members, including the Executive Director; the outgoing and incoming elected presidents of the union; the leader of a splinter group within the union; and a president of a union

local. In total, there were 18 participants. Of these, 5 (28%) were female and 13 (72%) were male. At the time of the study, all participants were teachers or administrators in schools around the province. (Unlike other teacher unions in Canada, this union represents administrators at all levels, including superintendents.) All but one of the provincial executive members had previously served as president of a union local. All provincial executive members regularly attended meetings of the locals that they represented.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with teacher union leaders as described in the sample. Interviews averaged two hours in length and in most cases they were audio recorded, with the permission of each participant, and later transcribed verbatim. A transcript of the interview was then sent to the participant for editing. In addition to interview data, documents such as position papers, council resolutions, and newsletters were obtained. A written history of the organization provided historical background.

Data Analysis

Data analysis started informally when the researcher entered the field and was ongoing throughout the study. Emergent themes directed subsequent sampling and data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data were managed via qualitative data management software, however the primary instrument of analysis was the researcher who read and reread the data, immersing herself within the data over several months. Data were unitized, searched for emerging themes that related to the primary research question, and coded according to researcher-generated theme categories. Computer software facilitated cross-theme analysis of data. These themes were then searched for more specific themes and a complex hierarchy of themes developed. Working hypotheses were tested by reviewing data for confirming or disconfirming evidence, and by engaging key informants in dialogue related to emergent themes and working hypotheses. A process of discounting was used to discard low-credibility data and negative cases were sought deliberately (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Patton, 1990).

Ensuring the Trustworthiness of the Study

The credibility, confirmability, and dependability of the study were enhanced through limited triangulation of data sources, sampling to saturation, the use of member checks to confirm data or working hypotheses, and the discounting of data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1995;

Patton, 1990). Confirmability and dependability were further enhanced through the maintenance of all transcripts, documents, data reduction notes, analytical notes, and other materials to enable auditing (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990; Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Transferability is limited because the findings represent data collected from a single teacher organization. However, this study is part of a broader study involving four teacher organizations. Transferability will increase as additional teacher organizations are added to the study.

Findings

Overwhelmingly, participants agreed that the teacher union has dual roles: to promote the economic and professional interests of teachers, which participants generally described as "ec welfare" (economic welfare) and "PD" (professional development). None of the participants questioned the validity of either of these two roles; both were described as "very important." Less frequently mentioned (65% of participants) was a third role--that of promoting quality education. This contrasts with a survey of the membership undertaken by the union in 1992 which revealed that 82% of the membership wanted the union to advocate for quality education (Grant, 1992). Fewer participants (12%) mentioned a fourth role of the union, which one person referred to as "a concern for social justice." Included in this category were concerns about the increasing gap between rich and poor in society, with its related issues of child poverty and labor legislation.

The four roles will be discussed in turn. Economic welfare and professional development, being the roles most frequently identified will be considered first, followed by the union's role in promoting quality education and social justice.

The Dualities of Economic Welfare and Professional Development

Generally, economic welfare and professional development issues were considered to be distinct categories. Typically, matters that were described as ec welfare issues were salaries, benefits, negotiations, and grievances. Often legal protection was categorized as an economic welfare issue; sometimes it was considered separately. Professional development issues tended to be things like in-services, conferences, courses, sabbatical leaves, curriculum development, special associations, and member services such as personal counseling. Educational research, when it was mentioned, generally was linked to professional development. Teacher certification was sometimes described as an ec welfare issue and sometimes as a PD issue. The same was true of working conditions.

Participants spoke about how the dual roles of economic welfare and professional development created the problem of deciding how much weight to give to each set of interests at a time when resources were dwindling. The problem was complicated by the tendency of provincial executive members, and members in general, to have strong preferences for either economic welfare or professional development. As one participant explained, "People tend to be one or the other. You are really a PD person or really an ec welfare person." Participants sometimes openly expressed their preferences: "Economic welfare is important to me, but it is not all-consuming for me," or "I've always been more active on the ec welfare side rather than the PD side." The result was that although "We're very much aware of the other stuff . . . our strong suit is one of those areas." The tendency to identify themselves as ec welfare or PD people resulted in differing perspectives about how union resources should be allocated, as evident in the comment that "We have a broad range: People who say 'Well, the union thinks of monetary issues too much and nothing about professional development,' and then another view that 'Economic welfare is what we should be concerned about mostly'."

The tension between economic welfare or professional development is a microcosm of a broader debate about whether the organization should be a professional association or a union. This debate is related to the dualities of economic welfare and professional development because, as one participant explained, "If we were a union, we wouldn't need to do so much PD. If we were an association, we wouldn't do the ec welfare things."

Essentially, the association versus union debate is a debate about individual and organizational identity. On the one hand are those members of the organization who identify with a professional image and who strive to create a teacher organization that will affirm this professional image. On the other hand are those members who, for one reason or another, identify less with the professional image and whose desire to perceive themselves and to be perceived by others as professionals is less of an imperative. Probably the strongest example of the latter perspective came from a participant who said,

> We've kind of been off in this ivory tower with our professional pretensions, and I think there is a certain amount of class bias evident there. But, as teachers in the last five years, ever since the deficit-dropping mania has become preponderant, we have, whether we like it or not, been lumped together with other public sector workers and unions. . . . We should identify with the labor movement more than we have in the past or are doing now.

If teachers are treated like labor, then, according to this participant, it is okay, even necessary, to respond like labor. To let professionalism stand in the way is simply pretentious.

There tends to be a higher concentration of militant teachers in one particular region of the province that has a strong labor history. Many teachers in this region come from the homes and communities of coal miners and steel workers, they have had roots in the labor movement since childhood, they have internalized at least some of the assumptions of unionism, and they bring these assumptions with them to the teaching profession. For example, an executive member explained:

> Illegal strikes are part and parcel of this island, you know. That part never bothers me. You know, I'm probably my father's daughter. But it does bother a lot of people, of course. . . . They're very professional and they're into professional development type activities.

A sense of the significance of unionist socialization and the internalization of traditional union assumptions is apparent in a story told by one executive member who recalled having to "fight with union people to get them to take a union position." A newcomer to the local executive questioned the union's position that promotions should be granted on the basis of seniority. Perceiving that the problem was lack of training, the storyteller felt obligated to fill in what was missing, engaging in protracted debate with the union member. "I convinced him after about 15 hours," the storyteller said, adding "I've never seen that before." From the perspective of this participant, it was incredible that a union member would not understand or share a unionist's traditional stand on matters of promotion.

The professional association versus union debate surfaces periodically and formally at annual council meetings where delegates from each local within the union meet to establish organizational policy and direction. Such resolutions continue to be defeated. Substantiating what others had said, one participant explained: "Years ago you'd see that resolution at council every two or three years. 'Let's rename ourselves a professional association rather than a union.' . . . I haven't heard it in over a decade now." In 1962, a resolution was passed at council to rename the union. However, by 1963 the membership could not agree on what the organization should be called (the most popular names incorporated the terms federation or association), and a new resolution to change the name of the union was defeated. Since the association versus union debate has been dormant for many years, it appears that the union membership has reached consensus that the union is neither wholly an association nor wholly a

union, and that both economic welfare and professional development are important interests for the union to pursue.

Although the issue may have disappeared or gone into hibernation at a formal level, the same debate continues more informally during discussions around the provincial executive table:

> I suppose probably the most divisive issue at any time, for us, is how much of a union we should be and how much of a professional organization we should be. How militant we should be and balance that with the fact that we are educators, we educate children, we are in the public eye. . . . And so, at the table, you get a lot of people saying, "We don't get any respect anyway, so the hell with it, let's just stand up and deal with this." And another group will say, "No. We are educators and when we took on this profession we knew it was our job to do the best that we could do for the benefit of the children. And without the children we wouldn't exist, so we have to consider the children." So you get that divisiveness.

Deciding that the union is a combination of association and union does not solve the problem of just how to mix professional development issues and economic issues.

Comments like the above also suggest that an emphasis on the professional interests or the economic interests of the union carries with it a characteristic orientation toward practice, a specific logic about how to approach problems that the union is addressing. Therefore, the debate is not just an academic one, but a practical one with which union leaders have to grapple on a routine basis as a means of guiding union action. The debate cannot simply be dismissed by assuming that both sets of interests are valid and important because it fails to solve the problem of how the union will enact its dual roles. If it is assumed that the union will emphasize both economic welfare and professional development roles, how, then, will union leaders enact those roles? How will the union behave in ways that are at once consistent with a professional orientation and a union orientation?

The answer to the question may be tied to the ways in which union members and union leaders make sense of the relationship between economic welfare and professional development and the implications that the relationship has for enacting the union's role. As a means of exploring this issue, it is necessary to take a closer look at how union leaders are constructing meaning about the relationship between economic welfare and professional development, and how this relationship is connected to the debate about the union's identity.

The dualities as interdependent. Participants found unique ways to connect the apparently disparate roles of the union. In part, the relationship between economic welfare and professional development made sense because both were matters that could be reduced to the common denominator of collective bargaining. Economic issues such as salaries and benefits were common contractual items, but contracts also contained provisions for professional development opportunities, such as in-service committees, provincial conferences, and funds to support independent study. Ec welfare and professional development, then, have a process connection--both could be negotiated and become part of collective agreements. Since economic cutbacks had resulted in diminished professional development opportunities for teachers, the union placed an increasing emphasis on achieving professional development provisions in collective agreements: "We have to find opportunities for teachers to have more PD, but how can we do that through economic welfare?" Comments such as these suggest a linear relationship between ec welfare and PD. Ec welfare, viewed here as negotiating contracts, was a means of achieving professional development opportunities for teachers.

While some viewed ec welfare as a means of procuring PD opportunities for teachers, others viewed PD as a means of achieving some ec welfare goals for teachers: "Professional development is great protection for a teacher," claimed an executive member. "I will not put down the clear economic welfare idea of . . . a good contract with good benefits . . . but your greatest protection, I think, are developing your own skills." These examples illustrate the difficulty of drawing clear lines between economic welfare issues and professional welfare issues. The lines were blurred by multiple meanings about the dualities that individuals had constructed.

Participants sometimes blurred the distinctions between categories. For example, a participant claimed:

> People might try to separate the two, but I don't see them as separated. The [union's] role is to look after economic welfare, and economic welfare is to make sure that [teachers] are getting resources, professional development, knowledge, and all of those things to operate in the classroom, which includes their working conditions. . . . That is exactly what I mean by economic welfare. . . . When they are getting into curriculum development and all of those things. Why are they there? It is to look after the economic welfare of the teachers in the classroom.

From the perspective of another participant:

> When you look at professional development, you are also, in my mind, looking at the welfare of the teachers. . . . It does give teachers, who might not have an

> opportunity because of financial constraints, to better themselves and upgrade. And that, hopefully, will trickle down [and result in benefits to students in the classroom].

Contractual clauses related to professional development, in the latter example, are viewed primarily as economic benefits that otherwise would have to come from teachers' own pockets. In this sense, professional development is defined narrowly and becomes synonymous with economic welfare. In the former example, the definition of economic welfare is almost synonymous with what others defined as professional development. Another participant went so far as to claim that "All issues, even those such as class size, are largely economic welfare issues."

Promoting Quality Education

Although most interviewees mentioned the union's role in promoting quality education, most raised it as a secondary issue that was overshadowed by the dualities of ec welfare and PD. A few participants, however, stressed the promotion of quality education as a role that was equal to those of economic welfare and professional development. According to one participant,

> I think the [union] is the most forward looking participant in the whole education game. . . . Certainly we have our short-term needs . . . but I think we have a stronger long-term view of what's needed to make education work. . . . We published a document which talks about a much longer-term vision of education. A vision of the schools we'd want in our society, wherever that society goes, whatever direction that society takes.

This participant criticized the government for its tendency to focus on short-term fixes, such as amalgamation of school boards, which were driven by short-term financial needs rather than by what was best for students and for education in general.

One participant was specific about the union's quality of education role. "Being a voice for education," as he called it, meant: (1) identifying educational issues and concerns for teachers and for the public; (2) educating the membership, the public, and the government when the government makes policy mistakes; and (3) monitoring educational trends so as to help teachers keep abreast of new ideas and initiatives that will affect them in the classroom. Monitoring educational trends was necessary, he explained, because

> A lot of teachers get hit over the head, so to speak, with new ideas. All of a sudden we are into whole language or assessment portfolios, or whatever . . . and they're saying, "Well, I didn't know anything about this. What happened?" And

> it's because we tend to go in our classrooms and shut our doors. And we may not . . . keep up with changing trends. At least the [union] does let us do that.

For participants like this one, promoting quality education was a primary, not a secondary, goal of the organization.

Those participants who talked about the promotion of quality education as a secondary role, spoke about specific links between the primary roles (ec welfare and PD) and the secondary role of promoting quality education. These linkages differed from individual to individual, but three patterns emerged: (1) those who perceived a connection between professional development and quality education; (2) those who perceived a connection between economic welfare and quality education, and (3) those who perceived a connection between all three--professional development, economic welfare, and quality education.

Links between PD and quality education. Participants linked professional development to quality education, usually in a linear fashion. First, professional development provisions in contracts often provided money for teachers to engage in upgrading their skills through further education or attendance at conferences and workshops. From an executive member's perspective: "I think that PD is extremely important. Especially in the light of retraining our teachers. . . . They have to be into the latest technology. They have to be able to share this new PD that they've updated with their students." At the provincial level, the union had negotiated a jointly-managed Professional Development Assistance Fund which provided grants to teachers for unique curriculum development projects. Teachers took advantage of the PDAF fund in myriad ways. For example:

> At my high school, an English teacher was able to create a whole new reading program, complete with a mini-library for his English courses. Many, many years ago, when video first came on the scene, I received a grant and we recreated different periods of historical times and events and developed a video library of curriculum. . . . Those are just a couple of examples, but all over this province, many, many PDAF grants have helped teachers in the classroom and benefited the children in return.

The union also initiated unilateral professional development opportunities, such as study grants and summer short courses, which participants perceived as contributing to better quality of instruction and learning in the classroom:

> I think the more you know [as a teacher] the better you can cause the learning process to happen. The union's doing a thing on classroom management, on

> learning teaching strategies. I think that's the best way to help out a teacher, to help them to do well.

In general, there was agreement that "teachers can't continue to do their best without renewal," or professional development, and doing their best would lead to improved education for students.

Links between economic welfare and quality education. A commonly held belief among participants was the close connection between economic welfare and quality education. The general argument was that teachers who were paid well and enjoyed job security could focus more of their attention on doing a good job in the classroom. One participant explained that the union

> can create a good environment for children by looking after and protecting the teachers. And I guess that boils down to ec welfare. . . . That trickles down to children. Because if your teachers are hurting, then your children are going to hurt. If you have teachers who are happy and are satisfied with their union, and a reasonable wage to live comfortably, and not having to worry about whether their job is going to be there next year or not, then I think you're going to have a better educational environment for the children.

Job security is necessary in order to provide the stability that teachers needed in order to concentrate on their work with students.

Job security is also necessary to protect professionals who speak out when administrators or policy makers make decisions that they perceive to be educationally unsound, part of the monitoring role which participants took seriously: "I really believe that the [union] is important to protect teachers and their rights. I mean I love my job, I really do, but I speak out when I see something that I don't think is right. And that wouldn't be tolerated without some sort of protection." Speaking out is an important means by which union leaders perceive that they contribute to the quality of education within their districts and within the province in general, yet the fear of retribution for speaking out against management decisions is a continuing reality for teachers. Decreased job security, they were convinced, would have a detrimental impact on the quality of education in the province because it would weaken the professional voice of teachers.

Economic welfare and quality education also were connected through working conditions. According to one participant "Working conditions reflect learning conditions, in my opinion. If you devalue working conditions, you've got a very good chance that learning conditions are going to deteriorate, too." Participants described how working conditions in schools had declined during the 1990s, especially since the

1994 contract in which teachers had made a number of concessions to government. In addition to a reduction in salary and increased premiums for health care, class preparation time was reduced for many teachers, the annual provincial conference day was lost, sabbatical leaves were ended, certified substitute teachers no longer would be paid according to the teacher salary scale, and teacher librarians were replaced by library technicians. "These were all things that we agreed to that, at first glance, were ec welfare types of things but, in fact, were quality of education types of things," said one participant. An early retirement program, designed to reduce teaching staff without the need to terminate teachers, resulted in a reduction in force of close to 2000 teachers. Many teachers blame staff reductions for increased class sizes and increased work loads. One teacher participant explained:

> I teach in a small rural high school. Now, we have lost about four staff people over the last few years, but the province requires us to offer the same number of courses that are offered . . . in a school with 1000. . . . So, as a result, I teach six different courses; six different subjects. I used to teach two . . . so it was two preparations and I felt I did a great job. I still do a good job, but I don't do as good a job as I know I'm capable of doing. You know, six different courses, classes change every 50 minutes, so you go from ancient history to modern world problems, and then to sociology, and so on. And the workload, the testing. You know, I have 130 students.

According to the Executive Director, such conditions mean that

> You're saying to a teacher, "Decrease your preparation time (because you're not allowed any more than 10% now), serve on the advisory board 3 nights a week or whatever it might be, teach more and different programs than you've taught before, have a larger class size than you've ever had before and, by the way, within that class size you've got 3, 4, 5, hard-to-serve children. Now have a good year." . . . But the support structures are gone, too. Not as many administrators around as there used to be, so you can't get ahold of the administrator when you need him. . . . So my resources for basic supplies are down. My human resource, my support structure is gone. My librarian is probably gone. I haven't got the teacher aides I used to have available.

From the perspective of union leaders, declining working conditions were having a negative impact on the quality of education in schools, a matter which concerned them greatly.

Links between teacher protection, professional development, and quality education. According to many participants, three of the roles of the union--economic

welfare, professional development, and promoting quality education, were interconnected. The union president believed that "PD opportunities . . . help provide a better teacher. And a better teacher, basically, is much much easier to bargain for on the ec welfare side." According to this perspective, professional development could lead to better teachers and better quality education, which, in turn, would provide evidence to support union demands on the economic side. A study of public opinion commissioned by the union in 1992 recommended that the union take a leadership position regarding the quality of education and that the union should avoid confrontational labor action since that might erode public support for teachers (Grant, 1992). The president and executive director in 1992 argued that most of the union's objectives had been achieved in the area of economic welfare. These leaders advocated increased emphasis on "professional" issues, negotiating such things as class size, the duties of a teacher, and opportunities for professional development. They believed that advocacy for public education would elicit a favorable public response as opposed to the generally negative reaction to teacher demands for salary and benefit improvements.

Putting professional issues first would not work, claimed one participant, who offered an opposing perspective:

> If you're seen to be vulnerable on the economic front, if the government discovers they can push you around and take this and that benefit away from you, and force you to accept economic concessions, and basically, you can't defend your contracts, then they're not going to have any reason to pay attention to you when you're talking about professional welfare issues, or when you're talking about the quality of education. Basically, you'll be seen as a paper tiger whose views are irrelevant. . . . In the long run we would do more to protect the quality of the education system and to establish ourselves as professionals with an interest in the quality of education by standing first on [economic welfare] issues.

This participant, who represents a militant splinter group within the union, advocated putting economic issues first when dealing with government.

Participants agree that the union should pursue both economic welfare and professional development interests. However, they did not necessarily agree on an appropriate pathway for achieving those goals.

Concern for Social Justice

Two participants believed that part of the union's role should be to promote social justice. One participant, referring to a 3% salary rollback in the 1994 contract, perceived that teachers' fight against reduced salaries, and the pursuit of economic welfare issues more generally, were part of a broader social agenda:

> We see ourselves as fighting against everyone's reduction. If we acquiesce in a salary reduction for us, we're also acquiescing in a salary reduction for everybody else. . . . We have a broader social mandate in that sense that if we don't stand up for the social and economic rights of working people, who will? . . . We're all, in some sense, responsible for the collectivity. The collectivity is all of society. . . . Certainly in the 50s and 60s there was a notion that the economic elite couldn't simply plunder the wealth of the world for themselves and abandon the rest of society to the tender mercies of survival of the fittest. That seems to be vanishing now. . . . Society is becoming more selfish and we offer resistance to that trend.

As part of the middle class, and as part of a unified group, teachers were better placed than most other groups to help combat the increasing gap between rich and poor.

Concern for social justice and community issues are platforms of the militant splinter group known as the Teacher Action Council (TAC). The TAC leader believed that the union should identify with the labor movement, which has a history of advocating for social justice. Of special interest to TAC is labor legislation, particularly minimum wage legislation and anti-scab legislation that would protect workers in the future. The TAC leader argued that this was of interest to educators because most of their students would become employees of others in the future and they needed to have protection against possible exploitation. According to an executive staff member, another group believes that the union should not address all societal concerns, just those that have a direct impact on the classroom. Child poverty and community violence are social issues that union members believe to be directly relevant to educators because of the difficulty of teaching children whose basic needs were not being met. The union is addressing these issues by bringing together interested groups from across the province to engage in dialogue and action. Participants who did not necessarily mention social justice as a primary role of the union, nevertheless talked about these initiatives as important steps in the promotion of quality education.

Factors Influencing the Construction of the Union's Role

A number of internal and environmental factors influence how union leaders make sense of the union's role, including membership issues, the government's policy agenda, the degree of public support for union goals, and the extent to which members shared a local or provincial perspective.

Member Issues and Concerns

As described earlier in this paper, union members tend to identify themselves as primarily ec welfare people or PD people. This phenomenon means that the union concentrates much of its attention on striking an appropriate balance between economic welfare issues and professional development issues. The construction of economic welfare and professional development as competing roles is perpetuated by this tendency of members and executive committee members to advocate for resource allocation favorable to their sets of concerns.

After years of cost-reduction measures, teachers in this province are facing deteriorating working conditions and expectations that they will do more with less. The losses they have suffered in recent years have drawn members' attention to immediate short-term needs. According to the Executive Director, "We've got a counseling service up here that is full up and growing. . . . [and] we've got legal bills that are escalating, and they don't have a lot to do with professional interests; they have to do with working conditions and the rights of individuals who've gotten trampled on." Members are questioning the union's ability to meet their needs and union leaders feel pressured to do more to satisfy teachers' needs, especially their immediate needs.

Discontent with the union's direction has led to the establishment of TAC. TAC is committed to renewing the economic welfare focus of the union. The leader of TAC won 45% of the vote in a 1996 election for union president. Many participants perceive this close contest as an indication that the union leadership needs to listen more carefully to the voices of members and to open two-way communication between the leadership and the membership.

A common theme shared by provincial executive members was teachers' misunderstandings about the work they did at the provincial level. Some teachers believed that the regular meetings that provincial executive members attended in the province's capital were little more than paid vacations. In reality, executive members received no more than reimbursement for expenses related to their travel, even though some executive members traveled over 300 miles to attend these meetings. Teachers often had little understanding about the work that was accomplished at these meetings and little appreciation of the difficulty of reaching agreements that would satisfy members from various regions of the province who might have different interests. As explained by the outgoing president, "the leadership is always privy to much more information and a greater appreciation of the circumstances than the membership is on a lot of issues." Both the outgoing and incoming presidents advocated increased communication between the leadership and the membership.

Executive members explained how when they joined the provincial executive they learned to develop a provincial perspective, as opposed to a local perspective. For some, serving on the provincial executive was less rewarding than work at the local level because it was sometimes difficult to see concrete results of decisions made and initiatives undertaken at the provincial level. One participant stated, "I like the job of local president. I can see what I'm doing for people. At the provincial level, I don't see that." This participant also indicated that "I'm probably at the end of where I'll go with the [union]." The ambiguous outcomes of the provincial executive's work, coupled with an aversion for political gamesmanship, caused this provincial executive member to prefer working at a local level where economic welfare and professional development needs could be addressed more directly. Provincial executive members found themselves torn between addressing the short term and localized needs of members and addressing the long-term and systemic needs of the organization and of education in general.

Government Agenda

During the 1990s the union has experienced what it describes as an "attack against the union" by two different governments. Since 1991, government initiatives have resulted in economic welfare losses such as a two-year freeze on salaries, a 2% clawback through unpaid leave days, a 3% permanent rollback in salary, increases in pension plan premiums to cover unfunded liability, cuts to health care benefits, reductions in substitute teachers' pay, and the effective suspension of free and open collective bargaining until November, 1997. During the same period teachers experienced cuts to education funding, cancellation of sabbatical leaves for teachers, loss of a province-wide conference day, and restriction of preparation time to 10% of the school day.

Some of the measures described have been achieved through collective bargaining, while others have been achieved through legislation, which union leaders perceive to be a violation of collective bargaining rights and, in at least one case, a breach of contract. These measures have renewed the union's attention to economic and professional development contractual issues. The executive director reports that an increasing share of the budget is being diverted from professional development to economic welfare, out of necessity. As one participant put it, "You have to put your troops in the area where the heaviest fighting is going on."

In 1995, government proposed changes to the Education Act which would have given the powers of district school boards to school-based councils, instituted disciplinary action for the failure of teachers and parents to comply with vague standards, permitted boards to lay off teachers without regard to tenure and seniority, and removed senior administrators from the union. The union launched a massive

education campaign geared toward parents and legislators and, unlike the 1994 contract dispute, the union leadership was successful in achieving a strong mandate (89%) for strike action. The Minister made dozens of substantive amendments to the proposed Act and the union claimed victory.

The Department of Education, which once perceived the union to be a partner who acted in an advisory capacity to the Department in the development of curriculum and other educational policies, no longer directly consults the union on such issues. When one participant asked the Minister of Education why he had not consulted the union before proposing changes to the Education Act, the Minister responded "What do I need to talk to you people for?" The Department of Education has joined with other departments of education in the region to develop regional initiatives related to curriculum and student assessment, pushing the union even further out of the loop since it operates on a provincial, not a regional, level. The Department of Education, in conjunction with this regional body, has produced numerous documents related to curriculum and assessment to which the union has scrambled to respond. A staff member described how her time has been diverted from professional development issues and how more and more of her work involves responding to government policy. She describes herself as a "watchdog," continually on guard, protective of the union, and protective of the teaching profession in general. As one participant explained, "The government has kept us dancing." Union leaders are seriously concerned about what they perceive to be destructive reform efforts on the part of government:

> I'm not sure that the government hasn't decimated the educational system beyond repair. . . . I really think that we have pared down the system, taken the support structure to such an extent that we may, in 10 years time, see that we've made more terrible mistakes that we can't even correct until another 10 years. . . . I'm afraid for the system.

The union's response to government's agenda has been largely defensive. It has joined with other teacher organizations in the region to respond to government's regional initiatives and it has developed a public relations campaign designed to rebuild support for public education in the province.

Some of the union's initiatives are proactive. The experience with regional education initiatives and the Education Act have led the union to give increased attention to long-term goals--educational and professional. A staff member reported that the union is attempting to engage teachers in more "global issues," going beyond the consideration of contractual issues to a dialogue about teachers' professional responsibilities. According to this staff member, "Teachers love [the opportunity to

discuss broader substantive issues] and they are seeing the difficulty of meshing contractual and professional issues." As previously mentioned, the union co-sponsored two conferences on social issues, one on child poverty and one on community violence, assuming a leadership position in helping to improve the environment for education in the province. Focusing on long-term broader issues, however, is difficult in the present context of distrust between union and government and, and in the context of economic loss and deteriorating working conditions.

Public Perception of the Union

Union leaders recognize that the union has experienced declining support from the public throughout the 1980's and 1990's. Media stories about the lack of accountability in education, teacher incompetence, and the diminishing quality of education did much to erode public support for teachers throughout the 1980's. In addition, teachers, as explained by one participant, are often among the best paid people in the community in rural parts of the province. During recessions or periods of fiscal restraint, teachers are often perceived as whining over the loss of a few percentage points of salary when other community members are losing their jobs and their homes. From the perception of community members, "Well, we're all suffering; you people are fussing over your 3%. . . . I have no sympathy with that at all." Participants shared a belief that "Whenever money is the issue, generally the public is not sympathetic to teachers, since a significant number of citizens think we're overpaid, or certainly that we're adequately paid and therefore why would we be asking for more money."

All participants expressed the view that the union did not have the support of the public in the 1994 contract dispute, and many attributed this to the public perception that the issues were economic. This perception of the union's public image, when coupled with the identification of many members with teacher professionalism, contributed to a reluctance on the part of some teachers to strike over monetary issues. A strike vote in 1994 received the support of 68.2% of the membership and it quickly began to erode in confusion about the intended length of the proposed strike. Although participants believed that teachers would strike over monetary issues if they were hit long and hard enough, they explained that, in 1994, they found themselves up against a mindset among teachers that "Teachers don't strike; why are you asking us to do this?" Some participants, however, were convinced that "Teachers will not strike on monetary issues, but they will strike when teacher professionalism is attacked or when the [union] is attacked." The 1995 conflict was just such an issue.

In the dispute with government over the Education Act in 1995, the union enjoyed strong public support:

> Last fall [1995] was a different kettle of fish, a different situation altogether, in my view. We were dealing with legislation, the new Education Act. It wasn't dealing strictly with money, salaries or economic matters. This was dealing with the broad issue of the delivery of education.

One participant told a story about conflicting messages contained in letters that he and his colleagues were asked to send home to parents during the 1995 crisis. He said,

> In retrospect, it did seem kind of humorous, as I was passing out this threatening, warning letter from the Board, "Dear parents, if the teachers strike it will disrupt your life, and so on, so beware of the teachers' strike and work to oppose it." And the same time passing out a letter from the parents saying, "We endorse what the teachers are doing because this Education Act is a terrible thing and should be stopped, changed."

Participants agreed that the union had not been doing a good job of building public support for union issues. One participant was particularly critical, arguing that

> Our public relations efforts are just dismal, because what we do is spend oodles of money running ads to tell people what fine people we are and how important education is, and all of that. . . . I think a lot of the public look at that, and they see that advertorial, and look at the tenor of things, and they say 'There are the teachers just polishing their halo.' So I don't see that kind of public relations effort as being very productive. I think we would get a lot further in terms of public relations if we demonstrated . . . a concern for social justice issues, and also involvement in community issues.

So while there was agreement that more needed to be done to build public support, and it was agreed that the union needed to focus more of the public's attention on the union's non economic goals, participants disagreed about the specifics of how it should be accomplished. At the time of the study the union was using a variety of tactics, including advertorials and social action.

In summary, a number of factors influence the construction of meaning about the union's role and about the union's economic and educational interests. Internal factors such as membership needs created by a context of distrust, loss, and deteriorating working conditions constantly pull provincial executive members to respond to local needs which tend to be more immediate and contract oriented. The challenge of the rebel group, TAC, tends, on one hand, to pull union leaders toward a focus on economic welfare issues, while at the same time urging them to take more interest in social issues

such as child poverty. Member self-identification as PD people and ec welfare people continues to pull the union in apparently contradictory directions.

Externally, the government's agenda of deficit reduction and cost efficiency forces the union into a reactive, defensive role. When the economic welfare of teachers is threatened, the union responds by allocating more resources to economic welfare initiatives. When the educational system is threatened through proposed changes to the Education Act, the union responds by taking steps, including the threat of strike, to protect the public education system. Finally, the public's perception of teachers as overpaid and self-serving encourages those teachers with a professional orientation to emphasize educational issues and de-emphasize economic issues. Overall, throughout the 1990's there have been stronger pulls toward economic concerns as the union has reacted to a series of economic crises.

An Integrated Perspective of Paradox Construction

How do union leaders construct meaning about teachers' self-interests and teachers educational interests? The answer is complex, but at the heart of the matter, for this teacher union, are the dualities of economic welfare and professional development. As a means to better understand the construction of the dualities, I found it useful to examine them through the lens of paradox theory and to look at the implications of the construction of the dualities for developing capacity within the organization. Ford and Backoff (1988) contend that reality is constructed and, as part of that reality, paradoxical relationships are also constructed. The manner in which paradoxical relationships are constructed influence the behavior of individuals and organizations. Ford and Backoff offer three perspectives related to the construction of paradox and organizational change: formal logic, dialectics, and trialectics.

Formal logic views paradoxical dualities as static dichotomies or as opposite poles of a continuum. In either case, the resolution of the paradox results in a static solution. If the dualities are perceived as dichotomies, then resolution occurs by selecting one duality or the other, thereby excluding the other. An example of this is the tendency of the participants in the study to identify themselves with either the duality of economic welfare or the duality of professional development and to debate whether the union should be a professional association or a union.

If the dualities are constructed as poles of a continuum, then resolution comes in the form of a compromise. For example, participants in the study agreed that both dualities were important and that both would be included in their definition of the union's role, but they could not agree on an appropriate compromise between the two--

how much ec welfare or how much professional development was desirable. The logic of the continuum means that, although both dualities may be included in the resolution, neither can be included in its entirety. Also, no matter what balance is struck between the dualities, at any given point in time, the result is static. There will be a fixed degree of inclusion or exclusion of each of the dualities. The formal logic approach to the resolution of paradox can be problematic in an organization, such as the teachers union in this study, which has to respond to rapidly changing environmental conditions. The formal logic perspective emphasizes identity and stability rather than change.

A dialectic perspective "allows for change through opposition and conflict" (Ford & Backoff, p. 97). Dialectics views paradoxical dualities as dynamic interdependent forces that oppose one another, creating tension between the dualities that eventually leads to change. The assumption is that quantitative change leads to qualitative change. Contradictions internal to the organization "start small and gradually build up until they can no longer be maintained, and eventually the dualities negate each other and synthesize to form something completely different. Some of the language used by participants suggests a dialectic perspective (e.g. language that describes the interaction of the dualities as a "wrestling match," as a "tug-of-war," or as an "uneasy marriage"). Such language suggests a conceptualization of the dualities as dialectically opposed to one another. The possibility for synthesis seems unlikely, given the fact that most individuals tend to identify strongly with one duality or the other, maintaining a construction of the dualities as separate.

The trialectic perspective "harnesses the permanence of formal logic and the endless change of dialectics into a logic of cycles and process" (Ford & Backoff, p. 98). Trialectics assumes that paradoxical dualities are apparent opposites that often complement rather than contradict each other. When paradoxical dualities are constructed as interdependent, yet complementary, they are perceived to form dynamically balanced circulations of energy or cycles. The polarity and attraction of the dualities makes the circulation of energy, and equilibrium, possible within the cycle.

Organizations are actually sets of paradoxical cycles. Some of the dualities in these cycles occur on a horizontal level (e.g. the ec welfare/professional development dualities), some span hierarchical boundaries (e.g. ec welfare/quality education; or quality education/social justice). As minor disturbances occur within the cycle, the system oscillates between the dualities to maintain equilibrium. When the equilibrium is disturbed beyond a certain threshold and the system can no longer maintain equilibrium through oscillation between dualities in one dimension, then the system is attracted, or

pulled, toward alternative possibilities in a different dimension or at a higher or lower level, thus, transcending the paradox.

The conditions for transcending the ec welfare/PD paradox are present in the teacher union under study. Equilibrium within the organization is being disturbed by internal and external forces: The organization is under intense internal pressure to do more to support beleaguered teachers; the self-appointed internal watchdog group, TAC, is pressuring the leadership for structural change and a concentration of resources on economic welfare concerns; provincial and regional government initiatives geared toward educational reform, efficiency, and deficit-reduction have created a turbulent environment for the union; a climate of distrust between union and government has rendered the union's usual strategies for influencing public policy almost meaningless; and public support for the union is fragile and domain-specific. The conditions are ripe for discontinuous change within the organization.

Elements of the trialectic perspective were found among teacher union leaders in the study. For example, some union leaders talked about the dualities as complements, and participants perceived that there is a flow of energy from one pole to another, generally from economic welfare to professional development, or from economic welfare to quality of education. Some talked about the continuous oscillation between the dualities that depended upon contextual conditions. Under intense economic pressure in the early 1990's, the union tend to downshift, simplifying its focus and concentrating on economic welfare issues. However, the 1995 crisis over the Education Act led to an upshifting of the union's focus. The union broadened its range of interests: While continuing to work toward economic welfare and professional development objectives, a parallel emphasis was placed upon quality education and social justice. The union demonstrated that it was capable of concentrating, simultaneously, on short-term and long-term interests. Members at the local level demonstrated the capacity to hold a systemic view of the organization and to understand in greater depth the complexity of its role within the educational system.

The Development of Meaning

There are indications that the meaning that union leaders construct about the dualities is not static, but dynamic and emergent. For example, the either/or debate (association or union; ec welfare or PD) has been formally resolved, and members accept the legitimacy of each, even while they continue to prefer one over the other. Certainly none of the participants challenged the current both/and definition of the union's role. The debate now centers around how much of each duality to include. This is hardly

transformational change, but it represents a more sophisticated formal logic perspective than previously existed.

The inclusion of both economic welfare and professional development goals within the overall construction of the union's role makes sense because they are interdependent. This seems to be a rationalization that union leaders use to make sense of why both sets of goals are necessary to the organization. One can be an ec welfare person and continue to support PD, or one can be a PD person and continue to support ec welfare because one inevitably leads to the other. Union leaders now conceive of the relationship between the dualities as dynamic, rather than static. Energy moves from one duality to another. Although the dynamic is usually constructed as a linear transfer of energy, it suggests that a dialectic perspective may be emerging among the majority of the participants.

Evidence of the trialectic perspective exists among certain individuals. For example, the issue of quality education moves the discussion into a higher dimension. Participants commonly connected economic welfare and professional development to quality of education. Union leaders constructed meanings about how either economic welfare or professional development could lead to improved quality of education for students. The more dominant belief is that the pursuit of economic welfare goals can lead to improved professional development for teachers and that both will enhance the quality of education. The formal rejection of either/or distinctions, the recognition of interdependence, the realization of complementary properties, and linkage of the dualities in relationships that cross hierarchical dimensions are indicative of a trialectic perspective that subsumes, rather than replaces, the dialectic and formal logic perspectives.

Overall, the construction of teachers' interests have followed a developmental path: PD and ec welfare as either/or dichotomies; acceptance that both are legitimate and important; balance as compromise between the oppositional forces of ec welfare and PD; and finally, balance as management of energy created by complementary forces, pulled toward a higher level by concern for quality of education and social justice. These are not discrete stages in that more advanced stages contain elements of previous stages. The organization can and does regress to less sophisticated constructions of teachers interests, depending upon organizational and environmental conditions.

Union leaders are cognizant of the changes in their meaning structures. One participant, when asked to describe the relationship between ec welfare and PD, stated:

> If two years ago you had asked me that I probably would have answered that it has to be either/or. I don't think it has to be either/or. I think one complements

the other. I also think there is a need to marry more of those concepts, there's potential for doing that.

The executive director believes that, prior to 1994, the union had been moving toward what Kerchner and Mitchell (1988) call third generation unionism:

> I thought we had gone in our contracts . . . to a point where we had perhaps entered into trust agreements as opposed to contractual articles, where they could be adjudicated as opposed to arbitrated. . . . I really felt we were on that track. . . . I saw a need for refining our contractual articles and perhaps testing some areas, without being locked into the definitive language of contract. . . . I think there were some curriculum areas, for example, where we could have done some experimentation through trust agreements. . . . And there was a movement [within the union] to say, "We've got to change the way we do some things in the public school system." Now, we were not on the same wavelength or had the same vision of those changes as government had . . . but what we wanted was to provide a better system for the students within the province. . . . I would say that certainly from '94 on, we have regressed from what I consider to be that position. The issue is a matter of trust. There is no trust within either side, I don't think, of the other.

Union leaders blame government for the deterioration in their relationship.

Historically, this teacher union has collaborated with government in a variety of ways to improve education in the province, particularly in the areas of curriculum and professional certification standards. For example, the union pushed for and achieved the establishment of a Department of Education in the province, and since then has collaborated with the Department to raise teacher certification standards and to develop educational programs and curriculum. The union has collaborated with the Department and teacher education institutions to improve teacher training. By the early 1990s the union president and executive director, acting upon data collected from the membership at large, urged the organization to focus on the broader issue of quality education. From the perspective of the executive director and the outgoing president, the union, during the early 1990s, was moving toward strengthening an existing collaborative relationship with the Department of Education. They were surprised by what they perceived to be an unwarranted severing of the relationship, and a full-scale attack against the union on the part of government.

During 1994 and 1995, the union's quality of education initiatives centered around protectionism. Besieged by a government intent on simultaneously reforming and reducing the cost of education, and bombarded by one provincial or regional initiative

after another, union leaders assumed a reactive, defensive stance, attempting to slow the pace of education reform and resist further erosion of the existing system. During the Education Act crisis, the union leadership galvanized the full resources of the union and its membership to significantly alter legislation that teachers perceived to be detrimental to education. Teachers gave the union a strike mandate representing 89% of the membership to use as a tool, if necessary, to help achieve the union's objective. One of the factors contributing to leadership's ability to garner support is the fact that the quality of education issue, around which leaders constructed the Education Act crisis, transcends the ec welfare/professional development debate. Quality of education is an issue around which both ec welfare and PD people can, and did, muster.

There are indications that the union is reconstructing what it means to promote quality education. During and after the 1995 crisis, there occurred a visible shift from a reactive to a proactive stance in relation to public education, although the protectionist stance remains and additional resources have been allocated to economic welfare in anticipation of the opening of contract negotiations with the new amalgamated school boards in 1997. However, in addition, the union has allocated resources for the development of relationships with parent and community groups for the purpose of addressing broader social issues, such as child poverty and community violence. In other words, the union is attempting to enact changes in the environment rather than simply react to changes. Union leaders are attempting to enact changes that will create a social and economic environment where public education can flourish. In the summer of 1996, the provincial executive developed a set of goals that included support for the concept of free, equally accessible, public education; promoting the economic welfare of teachers; responding to regional education initiatives; expanding the mandate of the public affairs committee, and restructuring the organization. According to the president, the union has not prioritized this set of goals: "At any given time there might be more emphasis going on one than the other, but those are kind of operational calls at the time." Nevertheless, participants mentioned free, equally accessible, quality public education most frequently, describing this as one of the "basic tenants of a democratic society." As one participant explained,

> If you don't have the belief that a public education system works or that children deserve a good public education . . . if you don't believe that, I don't see how you can survive in the schools teaching. Because that's what it's all about. . . . I believe, socially, that your education system and your church system are your background to your community.

At the same time, this same participant explained that "the system supports us . . . it's the government that provides the jobs for us to have in the first place."

Within these two statements lies the crux of the self-interest, educational interest paradox. Union leaders have a belief system that values quality public education for its own sake because it is right for children and right for society; yet, union leaders also support quality public education because it provides the means to support themselves and their families. The self-interests and the educational interests of teachers are interdependent, complementary opposites. To accuse teacher unions of promoting their self-interests at the expense of quality education is to misunderstand the dynamics of the relationship between these apparently paradoxical interests and to construct the paradox through a less sophisticated lens. For union leaders, the relationship is complex and difficult to manage. In times of crisis union members concentrate on their immediate needs and sometimes lose sight of the larger picture. However, this cannot continue indefinitely because it becomes apparent that teachers immediate needs cannot be met without attending to the long-term best interests of the educational system. The education system can benefit from the development of more sophisticated constructions of the teacher union paradox by all of the players in the education system. Economic welfare and professional development are complementary forces that may be pulled to a higher level by a mutual concern for quality education and social justice. Understanding this relationship can serve as a bridge to developing productive relationships between union and management, and between union and government that may lead to renewal and growth for the education system.

References

Angell, G. (1981). Faculty and teacher bargaining: The impact of unions on education. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

Bacharach, S., Shedd, J., & Conley, S. (1989). School management and teacher unions: The capacity for cooperation in an age of reform. Teachers College Record, 91(1), 97-105.

Berube, M. (1988). Teacher politics: The influence of unions. New York: Greenwood Press.

Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (1982). Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Bridges, E. (1986). The Incompetent Teacher: The Challenge and the Response. Philadelphia: Falmer Press.

Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.). (1994). Handbook of qualitative research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Eberts, R., & Stone, J. (1984). Unions and public schools: The effect of collective bargaining on American education. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

Erlandson, D., Harris, E., Skipper, B., & Allen, S. (1993). Doing naturalistic inquiry: A guide to methods. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Fergusson, N. (1990). The story of the Nova Scotia Teachers Union: From the formation of the old union in 1895 to the 1980s. Armdale, NS: Nova Scotia Teachers Union.

Ford, J., & Backoff, R. (1988). Organizational change in and out of dualities and paradox. In R. Quinn & K. Cameron (Eds.), Paradox and transformation: Toward a theory of change in organization and management (pp. 81-121). Cambridge, MA: Ballinger.

Grant, J. (1992, June 12). Key issues in educational survey: Unified membership can achieve changes. The Teacher, 30(17), 1.

Kerchner, C., & Caufman, K. (1993). Building the airplane while its rolling down the runway. In C. Kerchner & J. Koppich (Eds.), A union of professionals: Labor relations and educational reform (pp. 1-24). New York: Teachers College Press.

Kerchner, C., & Koppich, J. (1993). A union of professionals: Labor relations and educational reform. New York: Teachers College Press.

Kerchner, C., & Mitchell, D. (1988). The changing idea of a teachers' union. New York: Falmer Press.

Lieberman, M. (1980). Public sector bargaining: A policy reappraisal. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. (1995). Designing qualitative research (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Nelson, J., Carlson, K., & Palonsky, S. (Eds.). (1996). Teacher unions: Detrimental or Beneficial. Critical issues in education: A dialectic approach (3rd. ed.), pp. 365-378. New York: McGraw-Hill.

O'Reilly, R. (1978). Understanding collective bargaining in education: Negotiations, contracts and disputes between teachers and boards. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press.

Patton, M. (1990). Qualitative evaluation and research methods (2nd ed.). New bury Park, CA: Sage.

Peck, L. (1988, July). Today's teacher unions are looking well beyond collective bargaining. The American School Board Journal, 175(7), 32-35.

Shedd, J. (1988). Collective bargaining, school reform, and the management of school systems. Educational Administration Quarterly, 24(4), 405-415.

Shedd, J., & Bacharach, S. (1991). Tangled hierarchies: Teachers as professionals and the management of schools. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Streshly, W., & DeMitchell, T. (1994). Teacher unions and TQE: Building quality labor relations. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Toch, T. (1991). In the name of excellence: The struggle to reform the nation's schools, why it's failing, and what should be done. Oxford University Press.

Urban, W. (1982). Why teachers organized. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Weick, K. (1995). Sensemaking in organizations. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Williams, D. (1981, 27 April). Teachers are in trouble. Newsweek.